

## The Progress of Johnson's Shakespeare: Subscription, Text, and Printing

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Bibliographers have long puzzled over Samuel Johnson's edition of *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, started in 1756 but repeatedly delayed until its eventual publication in 1765. Back in 1979 Brian Vickers wrote that, although "we do not yet have a full bibliographical study," it was nonetheless "evident that Johnson's Shakespeare had an erratic career in the printing-house."<sup>1</sup> More than twenty years earlier Arthur Sherbo had assembled a chronology of most of the known facts about the publication of the edition, though confessed there were "all too few references to particular volumes and plays" in his list and that evidence concerning the printing of the edition was scarce at best.<sup>2</sup> The publication of David Fleeman's seminal *A Bibliography of the Works of Samuel Johnson* in 2000 has since shed considerable light on some specific bibliographical problems.<sup>3</sup> And yet, despite Fleeman's advances, much still remains unknown about the printing and publication of this important literary edition. How was Johnson's subscription planned? How successful was it? How much money did Johnson and his publishers make? What copy did the printer use? When were the various parts of the edition finished? Why was publication, promised for Christmas 1757, delayed for nearly eight years?

Our aim in this essay is to answer those questions with reference to a wide range of documents: William Strahan's accounts for his printing of the original eight volumes, Johnson's correspondence with friends and colleagues on the matter, subscription receipts, and the finished volumes of the edition. Although the full reasons for the nearly nine-year delay in publication may never be known—lying deep in Johnson's psychology—it is possible through these records to establish a picture of how Johnson went about preparing his edition, including the arrangements for the subscription and the sources of his texts, and

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Vickers, *William Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, 6 vols. (London: Routledge, 1974-81), 5:19.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Sherbo, *Samuel Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare* (Urbana, Ill.: The University of Illinois Press, 1956), 10.

<sup>3</sup> J. D. Fleeman, *A Bibliography of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. James McLaverty, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 2:1081-90.

to observe the very rapid early progress he made. Much of the edition, we suggest, was in print by the initial deadline of Christmas 1757. A long period of inactivity followed. The final volumes published in October 1765 show signs of having been rushed—as do the volumes printed in the countdown to the first deadline. Johnson negotiated a clever deal that allowed him to recruit subscribers all through the edition’s protracted gestation period and even after publication. If Johnson’s primary motivation was “want of money,” as he later told John Hawkins, then the subscription fulfilled that objective perfectly.<sup>4</sup>

## I. THE CONTRACT

The contract for the edition of Shakespeare is in the Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum in Lichfield. Its terms are sufficiently interesting to merit transcription:

June 2. 1756.

Whereas an Edition of the Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare corrected and illustrated by M<sup>r</sup> Samuel Johnson is now preparing by him for the Press which is to be printed on a good Paper and Letter in eight Volumes Octavo.

Now it is hereby agreed between the said M<sup>r</sup> Johnson of the first part, and Jacob Tonson of London Bookseller in behalf of himself and the rest of the Proprietors of the Copy Right of Shakespeare of the other part as follows.

That in consideration of M<sup>r</sup> Johnson’s care and trouble in preparing the said Work for the Press, the said Jacob Tonson shall deliver him Two hundred and fifty Setts of the said Work for the Use of His Subscribers free of all costs and charges in Sheets. And it is also further agreed, that if the Number of Subscribers shall amount to more than two hundred and fifty, the said M<sup>r</sup> Johnson shall have any additional Number of Books paying to the said Jacob Tonson one Guinea for each Sett in Sheets.—

In consideration of which the said M<sup>r</sup> Johnson doth hereby assign over all his Right Title and Interest to the said Corrections and Illustrations unto the said Jacob Tonson for the Benefit of himself and the rest of the proprietors of the Dramatick Works of Shakespeare

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<sup>4</sup> John Hawkins, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (London, 1787), 363.

In witness whereof the Parties above mentioned have hereunto sett their Hands  
the Day and Year above written

Jacob Tonson for self & Co

Sam: Johnson<sup>5</sup>

Although the contract is dated 2 June, the printed proposals themselves were dated 1 June but not actually advertised until 8 June.<sup>6</sup> The impression conveyed by the dating—that the project was already underway, that much had already been agreed, and that only some details remained to be settled—is confirmed by the contract itself. The recital that precedes the actual agreement not only states that Johnson’s edition is already “now preparing by him for the Press” (which makes some sense of the promise in the proposals to deliver the edition by Christmas 1757), but also that it is to be printed on a good paper in a good letter in eight volumes. Much had already been settled. The agreement is in many ways unspecific, as though, for hardened professionals like Johnson and Tonson, the details need not be spelled out. There were to be eight volumes and Johnson was to be paid by a subscription, with 250 copies free and as many more as he needed at the cost of one guinea. Subscriptions would be sold for two guineas, meaning that Johnson would receive a guaranteed £525 from the free copies alone.<sup>7</sup> But there is nothing exact about the quality of the paper to be used, nor about how the subscription copies might be distinguished from the rest, nor any limitation on them in date or number, nor any indication of how Tonson and his partners were to make their profit—and there is no date for submission of copy. Clearly the arrangements were settled in the minds of the parties and the contract was merely a brief summary of them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lichfield, Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum, 2001.79.5. We are grateful to Joanne Wilson, Lichfield Museums and Heritage Officer, for her exceptionally generous help in preparing this paper.

<sup>6</sup> *London Evening Post*, 4459 (8 June 1756).

<sup>7</sup> For a contextual overview of this price point, see Robert D. Hume, “The Value of Money in Eighteenth-Century England: Incomes, Prices, Buying Power—and Some Problems in Cultural Economics,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77 (2014): 373–416 at 387.

<sup>8</sup> There is a sharp contrast with Pope’s detailed agreements for the subscription *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. For the former, see James McLaverty, “The Contract for Pope’s Translation of Homers *Iliad*: An Introduction and Transcription,” *The Library* 6th ser. 15 (1993): 206–25;

William Strahan's running account with Tonson for Johnson's Shakespeare confirms an early start to the project, doubtless with the aim of publishing the proposals at the beginning of June. An entry for May 1756 is for "Johnson's Proposals for Shakespear No. 3,000, with Alterations" (£2 2s.) and "Recdts for D<sup>o</sup> N<sup>o</sup> 1500, with Paper" (£1 1s.).<sup>9</sup> It is possible that Tonson covered the cost of the proposals, providing Strahan with the paper, as a bookseller usually would, but the charge for the paper for the receipts suggests that their cost was to be borne by Johnson. The difference between the number of proposals (3000) and the number of receipts (1500) indicates Johnson's assessment that the proposals would generate at best a fifty percent take up. And it would not have been expected that all the receipts, which were distributed to Johnson's friends as well as booksellers, would be used; perhaps a fifty percent return, 750 subscriptions, was expected from them as well.

The existence of Strahan's account allows some estimate to be made of the financial expectations of the parties to the contract. Printing was underway by 21 June 1757 and Tonson and partners had 1000 copies printed, 286½ sheets in total, at a cost of £384 5s. 6d.<sup>10</sup> But that does not include the cost of the paper, which is not of especially high quality; possibly 14s. per ream would represent an acceptable price for the ordinary demy they used, though it may be a little low. That would amount to £401. 2s. paid for paper, giving a total of £785 7s. 6d. for print and paper. In that case the expenditure would come in a little below the minimum possible return on the edition for Tonson and partners. If Johnson took all the copies for his subscription he would still pay them 750 guineas (£787 10s.) for those that were not completely free. In that perhaps rather unlikely event, the profit for Tonson and his

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for the latter, George Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), 313-16.

<sup>9</sup> British Library, Add MS 48803A, sig. 33<sup>v</sup>. This is the account kept in order to manage Tonson's bill. Some items have the day's date as well as the month and year; further items are squeezed in as they come up; receipt of payment is recorded. On the Strahan ledgers, see two essays by Patricia Hernlund, "William Strahan's Ledgers: Standard Charges for Printing, 1738-1785," *Studies in Bibliography* 20 (1967): 89-111 and "William Strahan's Ledgers, II: Charges for Papers, 1738-1785," *Studies in Bibliography* 22 (1969): 179-95. For further information about Strahan, see J. A. Cochrane, *Dr Johnson's Printer: The Life of William Strahan* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

<sup>10</sup> *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Bruce Redford, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992-4), 1:155.

partners would have come from any later editions, in which Johnson would have had no share. The project would have been worthwhile for them in establishing an authoritative edition with many future sales. A smaller number printed than 1,000 would have limited Johnson's opportunities for a really profitable subscription (here a potential 1250 guineas or £1312 10s.); a larger number might have eaten into the profits the partners would legitimately have hoped to make from future sales. We suspect that an estimate of a subscription limited to an edition of 1000 copies underlay the contract of 2 June 1756, but that Johnson would have been allowed to come back to the partners after he had taken a year to collect subscriptions. Printing began at the end of that year. The contract, then, placed no explicit limit on the numbers of Johnson's subscribers but we can arrive at a sense of the shared expectations.

## II. THE BEGINNING OF THE SUBSCRIPTION

The printed proposals for the "Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare, Corrected and Illustrated by Samuel Johnson" are laconic in their conditions.

- I. That the book shall be elegantly printed in eight volumes in octavo.
- II. That the price to subscribers shall be two guineas; one to be paid at subscribing, the other on the delivery of the book in sheets.
- III. That the work shall be published on or before Christmas 1757.<sup>11</sup>

There is no mention of a list of subscribers or of any privileges for subscribers. These absences support the impression that, at least in Johnson's mind, the subscription was designed simply as a way of selling the edition for his benefit. There is no evidence that at any point attempts were made to recruit the aristocrats and people in power that might usually have headed a subscription list.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Arthur Sherbo et al., 23 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958-), 7:58.

<sup>12</sup> On book subscription lists, see F. J. G. Robinson and P. J. Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists: A Revised Guide* (Newcastle: Hill, 1975); Ruth Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists: Extended Supplement to the Revised Guide* (Newcastle: Project for Historical Biobibliography, 1996); Robin Alston, F. J. G. Robinson, and P. J. Wallis, eds., *Checklist of Eighteenth-Century*

Printed receipts for subscriptions are, as might be expected from the *Proposals*, brief:

N<sup>o</sup> [space for number]

Received of [space for name]

One Guinea, being the First Payment for a Copy of SHAKESPEARE's WORKS;  
which I promise to deliver according to the *Proposals*. [space for Johnson's  
signature]<sup>13</sup>

Receipts would be purchased by subscribers for one guinea and then later exchanged, with the extra guinea, for the books. It is likely that, as David Fleeman suggests, the receipts were through-numbered and signed in advance. Only three are known to survive: one in the Rosenbach Library, Philadelphia, one in the Bodleian, and one in the Huntington—the present location of one that belonged to Arthur G. Rippey is not known.<sup>14</sup> The Huntington receipt, belonging to John Campbell, Earl of Loudoun, includes the extra inscription on the verso: “Mr Johnsons Receipt for a new edition of Shakespeares works Payed to Sir Thomas

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*Books Containing Lists of Subscribers* (Newcastle: Averro, 1983); Pat Rogers, “Pope and His Subscribers,” in *Essays on Pope* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 190-227. A book to avoid is Hugh Reid, *The Nature and Uses of Eighteenth-Century Book Subscription Lists* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> In discussing the collection of subscriptions, we have drawn on David Fleeman's “Johnson's *Shakespeare* (1765): The Progress of a Subscription,” in *Writers, Books, and Trade: An Eighteenth-Century Miscellany for William B. Todd*, ed. O. M. Brack (New York: AMS Press, 1994), 355-65, and on his typescript, “Samuel Johnson and the Book Trade: Some Preliminary Notes and Observations” (privately circulated in June 1987), 150-87. There is a variant copy of the latter in the Fleeman collection in St Andrews University Library, MS 38384/2/10.

<sup>14</sup> Fleeman records them as No 8 (though the paper is torn away after the 8), “Thos. Hay Esq” (Rosenbach Library, Philadelphia); No 27, “The Revd. Mr Seward” (Bodleian); No 660 “Earl of Loudoun” (Huntington); No 831 “Ld. B. Bertie [...] March 16 1759” (McMaster?). But McMaster cannot find the receipt in its collection; nor can Denver Public Library, which received other Rippey papers. The Bodleian receipt, for reasons that are unclear, has Johnson's signature on a small slip of paper stuck on to the receipt; the other two are signed in the normal way.

Rob[IN]son London Janua[r]y 30<sup>th</sup> 1759. £1 – 1 - ::.”<sup>15</sup> The manner in which subscriptions were collected is clear from the advertisements and from Johnson’s letters. The advertisement on the title page of the proposals informs readers that “Subscriptions are taken in by J. and R. TONSON, in the Strand; J. KNAPTON, in Ludgate-Street; C. HITCH and L. HAWES, and M. and T. LONGMAN, in Pater-noster-Row.”<sup>16</sup> Put simply, the booksellers were supporting Johnson’s subscription; he was not left to fend for himself. Even booksellers who were not partners in the edition assisted. Johnson wrote to an unidentified supporter on 28 September 1756: “I have sent you a dozen receipts signed. Mr. Vaillant [the bookseller] can give you proposals.”<sup>17</sup> But Johnson also called on his friends for help, such as Sir Thomas Robinson, from whom (as the inscription on the Huntington receipt makes clear) Loudoun obtained his subscription. His manner of proceeding is clear from a letter to his Lichfield friend, Edmund Hector, though it is noteworthy that he did not send it until 7 October 1756:

I have undertaken a new Edition of Shakespeare, and [...] the profits of it are to arise from a Subscription. I therefore solícite the interest of all my friends, and believe myself sure of yours without Solicitation. The proposals and receipts may be had from my Mother to whom I beg you to send for as many as you can dispose of, and to remit to her money which you or your acquaintance shall collect. Be so kind as to mention my undertaking to any other friends that I may have in your part of the kingdom, the activity of a few solicitors may produce great advantages to me.<sup>18</sup>

Johnson’s mother was not only in charge of the materials in Lichfield; she was also to benefit from the subscription. In a later letter dated 11 November 1756, Johnson told Hector, “as you receive three or four Guineas send them to my mother. She may want them.”<sup>19</sup>

Not all were given as much choice as Hector. Thomas Birch was told in a letter of 22 June 1756: “I have taken the liberty of recommending six receipts to your care, and do not

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<sup>15</sup> Huntington Library, LO 9626.

<sup>16</sup> *Proposals for Printing, by Subscription, the Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare, Corrected and Illustrated by Samuel Johnson* (London, 1756).

<sup>17</sup> *Letters*, 1:140.

<sup>18</sup> *Letters*, 1:142.

<sup>19</sup> *Letters*, 1:146-7.

doubt of your endeavour to dispose of them.”<sup>20</sup> Later in the subscription, on 8 March 1758, he told Charles Burney:

I have sent you a bundle of proposals, which I think, do not profess more than I have performed [...] I have likewise inclosed twelve receipts, not that I mean to impose upon you the trouble of pushing them with more importunity than may seem proper, but that you may rather have more than fewer than you shall want. The proposals you will disseminate as there shall be opportunity.<sup>21</sup>

From a letter to Robert Chambers of 14 April 1758, we learn a little more: “I have sent you a parcel of receipts, as a fund out of which any body that wants them may be supplied. Set down the numbers of those which you give to others.”<sup>22</sup> Presumably Johnson had recorded the numbers of receipts he had sent to Chambers. A letter sent to Thomas Warton on the same day illustrates why a record of the numbers was important, even though Johnson’s tone is reassuring:

You give yourself too much uneasiness, dear sir, about the loss of the papers. The loss is nothing, if nobody has found them, nor even then perhaps if the numbers be known. You are not the only Friend that has had the same mischance. You may repair your want of a stock which [is] deposited with Mr. Allen of Magdalen Hall, or out of a parcel which I have just sent to Mr. Chambers for the use of any body that will be so kind as to want them.<sup>23</sup>

The danger, of course, was that someone would obtain a receipt without having paid the money. Keeping a note of the numbers meant that at least there was a sense that the missing receipts might be traceable. We find such record keeping in Thomas Percy’s enigmatic jottings on a copy of the *Proposals* in the Bodleian Library. Unfortunately his record is scrappy:

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<sup>20</sup> *Letters*, 1:135.

<sup>21</sup> *Letters*, 1:159-60.

<sup>22</sup> *Letters*, 1:162.

<sup>23</sup> *Letters*, 1:163.



206	Dr. Stonehous	203 Skerrington Davenport Esq <sup>r</sup>
	Mr. —	of Davenport House, Shropshire
	Mr. Durant	205 Rich <sup>d</sup> . Parry Price, Esq
	Mr. Monson	of Bryn-y-piece Flintshire
	Mr. Haggit	206 Dr. Stonehouse of Northampton
N <sup>o</sup> . 18	Mr. Orlebar	207 Revd. Mr. Sam. Edwards
		Vicar of Welford Northtonshire
		208 Dr William Congreve of Bradney
		254 Mr. William Church Commoner of Xt. Ch: Oxon
		— Gervase Scrope Esq of Lincoln
		Mr. Will <sup>m</sup> Wright of St James's near Bridgenorth <sup>24</sup>

It seems reasonable to assume that Percy was originally given half a dozen receipts (203-8) and later asked for three more (254-6). The list on the left-hand side may record the people to whom he gave proposals. Mr. Orlebar's "N<sup>o</sup>. 18" is a mystery; perhaps he signed up with someone else. The untidy nature of the document hardly suggests a record intended for a list of subscribers.

### III. THE BEGINNING OF THE PRINTING

As noted above, the printing of the proposals and receipts predated the signing of the contract. The first evidence that printing was underway comes in a letter to Thomas Warton of 21 June 1757, where Johnson writes "I am printing my new Edition of Shakespeare."<sup>25</sup> Of course, if publication was to be achieved by Christmas of that year—as promised—a summer start was desirable. But it soon became clear that publication would have to be delayed. On 24 November 1757 Thomas Percy told William Shenstone, "Since I have been in Town I have seen M<sup>r</sup> Johnson often: He is not yet got thro' the second Volume: yet seems to think he shall publish Shakespear before Easter."<sup>26</sup> Johnson confirmed that timetable on Christmas

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<sup>24</sup> Bodleian Library, J. Pros. 130.

<sup>25</sup> *Letters*, 1:155.

<sup>26</sup> *The Percy Letters*, ed. Cleanth Brooks et al., 7 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 7:1-2.

Eve, when he informed Charles Burney that he intended to “publish about March.”<sup>27</sup> But on 8 March 1758 he admitted, “I am ashamed to tell you that my Shakespeare will not be out so soon as I promised my subscribers; but I did not promise them more than I promised myself. It will however be published before the summer.”<sup>28</sup> It was not—and from this point until the autumn of 1763 there is little evidence of progress

Although the predicted publication had not gone ahead, there had clearly been substantial progress in printing the edition. Percy reported on 24 November 1757 that Johnson was still working on volume II, and early in the new year, 9 January 1758, that Johnson “had not finished the third Volume when I was in London.”<sup>29</sup> In his letter to Burney of 8 March 1758 Johnson wrote that he had “printed many of the plays,” but provided no details about which ones.<sup>30</sup> Burney wrote a memorandum for Boswell in which he gave an account of a visit to Johnson’s garret where he was shown “Some volumes of his *Shakespeare* already printed.”<sup>31</sup> The dating of this meeting may not be that important because its evidence about the Shakespeare is confirmed by a letter of 1 June 1758 in which Johnson told Warton that Bennet Langton, returning to Oxford, would bring “some of my plays with him, which he has my permission to shew you, on condition that you both hide them from every body else.”<sup>32</sup> Although the prospect worries Bertrand Bronson, who in his introduction to the seventh volume of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (1958-) contemplates individual plays being shown round, the likelihood is that these were indeed volumes in boards.<sup>33</sup> By this point William Strahan had made significant headway in the printing, as his account makes clear.

Key to understanding Johnson’s preparation of Shakespeare is his choice of copy-text. Despite having promised in the proposals to correct “corruptions of the text” by “a careful collation of the oldest copies,” Johnson actually chose a recent modernized edition for his

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<sup>27</sup> *Letters*, 1:158.

<sup>28</sup> *Letters*, 1:159.

<sup>29</sup> *Percy Letters*, 7:1-2 and 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Letters*, 1:159.

<sup>31</sup> James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. L.F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-50), 1:329.

<sup>32</sup> *Letters*, 1:164.

<sup>33</sup> *Yale Edition*, 7:xviii-xxi.

copy-text.<sup>34</sup> This was not unusual among eighteenth-century editors of Shakespeare, as Marcus Walsh teaches us: Pope followed Rowe; Theobald used his annotated copy of Pope's second edition of 1728, interleaved with further notes; Warburton followed both Pope and Theobald at whim.<sup>35</sup> Johnson actually owned Theobald's annotated copy of Shakespeare's 1632 second folio.<sup>36</sup> Ever since Arthur Eastman established that Johnson worked from both the 1757 edition of Theobald's Shakespeare and from Warburton's 1747 edition, though, the hybrid text of Johnson's Shakespeare has puzzled critics.<sup>37</sup> Johnson switched between the two copy-texts, in Freya Johnston's words, "apparently at random."<sup>38</sup> According to Brian Vickers, "he moved from one to the other on no rational principle."<sup>39</sup> Yet, as Eastman points out, volume VI is especially odd because it is based almost exclusively on Warburton's text whereas the others are predominantly based on Theobald. Eastman's examination of the notes to that volume leads him to conclude that "Johnson appears to have used Warburton because he has no copy of Theobald's sixth volume at hand."<sup>40</sup> Our hypothesis is that Johnson began his editing with volume VI, using the set of Warburton's edition from which he had compiled

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<sup>34</sup> *Yale Edition*, 7:55.

<sup>35</sup> Marcus Walsh, *Shakespeare, Milton, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing: The Beginnings of Interpretative Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 178. On Theobald's use of Pope's text as printer's copy, see Richard Corballis, "Copy-Text for Theobald's Shakespeare," *The Library* 6th ser. 8 (1986): 156-9. Nine of the plays are held in Winchester College Library while *Antony and Cleopatra* is in the British Library, C.45.b.11.

<sup>36</sup> Donald Greene, *Samuel Johnson's Library: An Annotated Guide* (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1975), 102.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur M. Eastman, "The Texts From Which Johnson Printed His Shakespeare," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 49 (1950): 182-91. Eastman built on G. Blakemore Evans's earlier essay, "The Text of Johnson's *Shakespeare* (1765)," *Philological Quarterly* 28 (1949): 425-28. See too Shirley White Johnston, "Samuel Johnson's Text of *King Lear*: 'Dull Duty' Reassessed," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 6 (1976): 80-91.

<sup>38</sup> Freya Johnston, "Samuel Johnson," in *Great Shakespeareans*, ed. Peter Holland et al., 18 vols. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1:122.

<sup>39</sup> Vickers, *Critical Heritage*, 5:19.

<sup>40</sup> Eastman, "Texts," 191.

his *Dictionary*.<sup>41</sup> That set is now in the University of Aberystwyth Library but volume VI—which contains *Macbeth*—is missing.

Bertrand Bronson has previously speculated that Johnson started his editorial work with *Macbeth* because the proposals for his abandoned edition of Shakespeare in 1745 were issued alongside *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth*.<sup>42</sup> We suggest that Johnson began with *Macbeth* and then moved onto the surrounding plays in volume VI. In *Macbeth* there are just two notes signed “THEOBALD” and both are drawn from the first edition of 1733. Likewise, in *Coriolanus* there is only one note from Theobald and that probably derives from neither the first nor second editions, but rather from the 1745 reprint of Hanmer’s Shakespeare.<sup>43</sup> Although the texts of *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Titus Andronicus* have been corrected against Theobald, those modifications draw on the first edition and not the fourth edition of 1757.<sup>44</sup> Evidence suggests, then, that Johnson marked up the relevant volume of Warburton—probably with some “Papers Apart,” as Boswell calls them—and gave it to Strahan to use as printer’s copy. That explains its absence from the Aberystwyth set. However, the octavo Warburton was surely too cramped to provide reliable copy. At this point, and likely at Strahan’s instigation, Johnson switched his copy-text to the new duodecimo Theobald. This edition would either have been interleaved (something particularly easy to do when it was available in sheets) or cut up and pasted onto large sheets. In either case it could easily be marked up with variants and notes from Warburton as well as with Johnson’s own annotation.<sup>45</sup> Despite having switched copy-texts, Strahan retained key

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<sup>41</sup> University of Aberystwyth Library, George Powell Collection, GB0982 GP-4-2.

<sup>42</sup> *Yale Edition*, 7:xvii-xix.

<sup>43</sup> Eastman, “Texts,” 191.

<sup>44</sup> Eastman, “Texts,” 186.

<sup>45</sup> Theobald’s fourth edition was first advertised in the *Public Advertiser*, 6996 (29 March 1757), though presumably copies could have been made available to Johnson a little earlier. The benefits of interleaving are evident in *Samuel Johnson’s Unpublished Revisions to the Dictionary of the English Language: A Facsimile Edition*, ed. Allen Reddick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), but Wytze Gs Hellinga remarks on the growing practice of authors handing in copy on large loose sheets in his *Copy and Print in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1962), 100. That’s how copy for the *Dictionary* (1755) was prepared, with some pasting in of slips: see Allen Reddick, *The*

aspects of Warburton's typography: his practice of numbering scene divisions at the entrance of major characters, for example, and the italicization of titles such as "*Earl*" and "*Lady*."

Rather than working his way through the remaining and textually difficult tragedies, Johnson next edited the history plays, occasionally correcting his new Theobald copy-text against Warburton. It made sense for Johnson and Strahan to have worked through the history plays in order. Eastman's collations indicate that the texts of the first three plays of volume IV—*Richard II* and both parts of *Henry IV*—draw extensively from Warburton. This tallies with our expectation that corrections from Warburton would have been more thorough in the early stages of the editorial process. The plays in volume V, by contrast, are set entirely from Theobald, with a few exceptional lines in acts one and three of *Richard III*.<sup>46</sup> The comedies contained in volumes I through III are likewise Theobald heavy. Eastman fudges this issue in his analysis: "It may be thought odd," he writes, "that Johnson, who began his Shakespeare in 1756, was using for his first plays an edition dated 1757. Since most of the publishers of Theobald 1757 were also Johnson's publishers, I imagine they gave him advance volumes of Theobald's text as they came off the press."<sup>47</sup> But if Johnson began with Warburton and volume VI then his use of Theobald as copy-text for the comedies is no longer a problem.

By Christmas 1757 Johnson was close to finishing the first six volumes with II and III and would have been planning to use the first three months of 1758 to finish the last two volumes, VII and VIII, and the prefatory material. Volumes I to III were, we believe, printed in that order. The main clues come from the sequencing of plays in those volumes and Percy's correspondence, which implies that volume III was completed after volume II. Both Warburton and Theobald printed the plays in a sequence established by Pope in 1725, which was significantly different from their placement in both the first folio and Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition, which followed the order of the folio.<sup>48</sup> Volumes IV through VIII of Johnson's edition follow the copy-text exactly; the history plays and tragedies appear in the same order

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*Making of Johnson's Dictionary, 1746–1773*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), 56-57.

<sup>46</sup> Eastman, "Texts," 189.

<sup>47</sup> Eastman, "Texts," 186.

<sup>48</sup> On the ordering of plays in the first folio, see John Jowett, *Shakespeare and Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 86-88; G. P. V. Akrigg, "The Arrangement of the Tragedies in the First Folio," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 7 (1956): 443-45. Pope's rearrangement of the plays has, to the best of our knowledge, gone unremarked.

as Theobald and Warburton have them. The first three comedies in volume I are likewise in the same arrangement: *The Tempest* followed by *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The rest of the comedies, though, are printed in a completely different sequence. A few of the changes are seemingly minor: *Measure for Measure* moves up a place, as does *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Comedy of Errors*. *The Taming of the Shrew* drops one position. Other changes are more pronounced. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* drops six places in the contents whereas *The Winter's Tale* gains as many, moving from the final comedy in volume III to the central play in volume II. *Much Ado About Nothing* loses seven positions.

Johnson's movement away from the copy is most easily explained by his rush to meet the new March deadline. Percy's comments suggest that Johnson had difficulties in keeping up with his printer and responded to Strahan's requests for copy by handing over completed plays as and when they were finished. Johnson's newfound sense of urgency struck half way through the printing of volume I, when Strahan was forced to bump *Measure for Measure* up the printing order. The unfinished text of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*—originally the fourth play in volume I—was substituted by *The Merchant of Venice*, which strictly belonged in the next volume but would have been completed and could therefore be printed immediately. Likewise, *The Winter's Tale* must have been done by the time volume II went to press in December whereas *Much Ado* was still incomplete and deferred to volume III. *All's Well That Ends Well* was the last comedy to be edited and printed, probably because Johnson did not much like the play. His final note describes that play's "many delightful scenes, though not sufficiently probable, and some happy characters, though not new, nor produced by any deep knowledge of human nature." "The story of Bertram and Diana had been told before of Mariana and Angelo" in *Measure for Measure*, he added, "and, to confess the truth, scarcely merited to be heard a second time."<sup>49</sup> Mistakes in *All's Well* and other plays in that volume also indicate hasty printing. The number of pagination errors catalogued by Fleeman in volume III alone (six) equals the number of errors in all the other volumes of the edition combined, and it is littered with minor faults throughout.<sup>50</sup>

In short, initial progress on the edition was quick. Volume VI was in all likelihood the first to be printed, followed by volumes IV and V, which were complete by the end of autumn. Part-way through printing the sequence of comedies—beginning with volume I—

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<sup>49</sup> *Yale Edition*, 7:403-4.

<sup>50</sup> Fleeman, *Bibliography*, 2:1082-88.

Johnson and Strahan accelerated the process to meet their deadline. Their haste is manifest in the jumbled order of plays in those volumes and in other small errors. Having worked roughly backwards, volume III became a natural *terminus ad quem*. This semi-reverse order of printing we propose also makes greater sense of the correspondence. If Johnson was working sequentially and, as Percy notes, was stuck on volume II in November 1757, then he would have been hard pressed to have six more volumes finished by Easter, as he promised Burney the following month. Percy's subsequent comment that Johnson "had not finished the third Volume when I was in London" further implies the sequence of events outlined above. It is not that Percy was confused about which volume Johnson was working on; he mentions volume III because he knew it should have completed Johnson's pre-Christmas schedule.<sup>51</sup>

The dates of Strahan's accounts are difficult to interpret, but the most plausible date for his recording the printing of a thousand copies of "the first Six Volumes" is December 1758. The initial cost is £248 8s.; an additional of £17 9s. for "Extra Corrections and Alterations in these Volumes" may have been added later. The first payment is confidently dated 26 June 1759.<sup>52</sup> The preliminaries are not included in the 207 sheets charged for, but the concluding leaves of volumes III, VI, and VII, later printed together, were.<sup>53</sup> By March Johnson reported to have "printed many of the plays" and was sharing them among friends.<sup>54</sup> Then progress stopped. Strahan may have waited until the end of the year for work to begin on the preface and remaining two volumes of tragedies, but then have decided he should not any longer bear all the costs for the partners. The edition would remain unfinished for nearly seven years.

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<sup>51</sup> Sherbo, who is frequently in difficulties because he believes the edition was through printed from I to VIII, is particularly perplexed by Percy's "error": *Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare*, 10–11.

<sup>52</sup> British Library, Add MS 48803A, fol. 33<sup>v</sup>. There were doubtless rougher accounts that underlay these. Fleeman, *Bibliography*, 2:1089-90, quotes Strahan's journals recording sheets in 1 January 1759 and 156 in 1 January 1761, but these figures cannot be related to any volumes or the progress of the edition; they look like a rough estimate (American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, MS 1958.140).

<sup>53</sup> The evidence for this printing was first provided by Giles E. Dawson in 1946 and reported by Sherbo in *Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> *Letters*, 1:159.

### III. THE DELAY

Explanations for Johnson's failure to deliver his edition of Shakespeare on time usually emphasize the psychological trauma of leaving his home at Gough Square and his mother's death at the start of 1759. "I am very much grieved at my mother's death," he told his stepdaughter Lucy Porter, "and do not love to think nor to write about it."<sup>55</sup> There is, however, a whiff of procrastination about Johnson's activities from early 1758: his abundant contributions to the *Universal Chronicle*, for instance, and his involvement with the Society of Arts promoting exhibitions. We now want to suggest that Johnson actually had two very good reasons—both financial and textual—to delay further progress on his edition.

Because Johnson neither included a list of subscribers in the edition nor printed their copies on special paper, he could continue to gather subscriptions long after the first six volumes were printed. The longer he delayed, the more opportunity for collecting subscriptions and—because his money came from the subscribers and, with the exception of the initial 250 guineas, not from Tonson—the greater his profit. On 16 April 1757 Johnson told Hector, "The Subscription, though it does not equal perhaps my utmost hope, for when was hope not disappointed? yet goes on tolerably."<sup>56</sup> On Christmas Eve 1757, however, Johnson informed Charles Burney that "the subscription has not been very successful."<sup>57</sup> His initial delay after the first six volumes were completed might, then, have been intended to provide more time to gain subscriptions. We have already examined the mechanics of the subscription and how, after this point, Johnson continued to send receipts to his friends for them to "push" among non-subscribers.<sup>58</sup> He instructed Strahan to print another 500 receipts at some point in 1758, probably aiming for a second wave of subscriptions before the new March deadline. Johnson put in his last order for receipts in April 1761: a further 250 to bring the total number of receipts to 2250. From this we learn that Johnson continued to market his edition even while he failed to prepare his text.

However, Johnson had also promised in the *Proposals* to correct the "corruptions of the text" by "a careful collation of the oldest copies." Despite having taken two modern editions as his copy-text, volume VIII left Johnson with the opportunity of providing a textual

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<sup>55</sup> *Letters*, 1:183.

<sup>56</sup> *Letters*, 1:153.

<sup>57</sup> *Letters*, 1:158.

<sup>58</sup> *Letters*, 1:159-60.



apparatus—and that he simply could not do. Tiffany Stern has written perceptively about Johnson's failure to consult the voluminous collection of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century quartos belonging to his former pupil David Garrick.<sup>59</sup> Some of her conclusions have a bearing on the present discussion. Garrick bought his plays—originally from the Harleian collection—from Robert Dodsley in 1746, not for private scholarship but rather to ensure that any serious editor would need to court his patronage.<sup>60</sup> He facilitated scholarship by lending his books to prominent scholars and received handsome praise in return. Thus Percy lauded Garrick's "curious collections of old plays" which he shared "in the politest manner."<sup>61</sup> The younger Thomas Warton likewise recorded his findings from "Mr Garrick's curious library of chivalry, which his friends share in common with himself."<sup>62</sup> And yet, despite Garrick's constant encouragement that Johnson should make "full use of his collection," he refused to do so.<sup>63</sup> As Garrick's manservant later informed John Hawkins, "I was told to let Mr. Johnson have whatever books he wanted, but he never applied for any."<sup>64</sup> Why did Johnson fail to consult Garrick's quartos?

Stern's solution to this curious problem is neat. In 1758 Johnson and Garrick took opposite sides in a quarrel concerning Dodsley's new play *Cleone*. Despite having previously staged most of Dodsley's plays at Drury Lane, Garrick repeatedly refused to stage *Cleone* and then insulted the author by refusing him free entrance into Drury Lane—a standard benefit granted to all playwrights. When Covent Garden took on the play in December, Garrick attempted to sabotage its premiere by scheduling a new production of Susanna Centlivre's perennial favourite *The Busy Body* for the same night. Johnson, by contrast, attended the final rehearsal and early performances of *Cleone*, and, he told Bennet Langton, "supported it, as publicly as I might; for Doddy is my patron, and I would not desert him."<sup>65</sup> Garrick's friend and biographer Thomas Davies later confessed that he found Garrick's

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<sup>59</sup> Tiffany Stern, "'I do wish that you had mentioned Garrick': The Absence of Garrick in Johnson's *Shakespeare*," in *Comparative Excellence: Essays on Shakespeare and Johnson*, ed. Eric Rasmussen and Aaron Santesso (New York: AMS Press, 2007), 70-96.

<sup>60</sup> Stern "Garrick," 76-7.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 3 vols. (London, 1765), 1:xiii

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, 4 vols. (London, 1774-81), 2:173.

<sup>63</sup> Boswell, *Life*, 1:380.

<sup>64</sup> Hawkins, *Life*, 444.

<sup>65</sup> *Letters*, 1:171.

conduct in the affair “unjustifiable” and that “he treated a worthy man and an old acquaintance with severity and unkindness.”<sup>66</sup> Under these circumstances, Johnson may have felt it prudent to ignore Garrick’s library, not least because the books had originally belonged to Dodsley. Reliance on Garrick’s library would have upset his friend. Besides, Johnson very probably wanted to work in the comfort of his own home, where he could rely on the books he owned—editions of Shakespeare by Theobald, Warburton, and Hanmer, and his copy of the second folio—and on those he could easily borrow from helpers. Without access to Garrick’s books, Johnson could not assemble the textual apparatus he promised in the *Proposals*. Facing the unpleasant task of collating—and an awkward situation with Garrick and Dodsley—Johnson simply stopped all work on the edition. The extra opportunities for gathering subscriptions were a bonus.

Over the next few years subscribers grew increasingly impatient with Johnson’s tardiness. Late in 1762 Charles Churchill lampooned Johnson as “POMPOSO” in *The Ghost*: “He for Subscribers baits his hook, / And takes their cash—but where’s the Book?”<sup>67</sup> Boswell believed that Churchill’s “upbraiding satire” more than any other factor prompted “Johnson’s friends [to] urge him to dispatch” the edition.<sup>68</sup> On 3 September 1763 Johnson wrote to Percy with newfound determination: “I purpose to bring Shakespeare with me, and strike a stroke at him with your kind help. Be pleased to get together all observations that you have made upon his works.”<sup>69</sup> Frenetic activity ensued—in December 1763 Percy believed Johnson was “putting the finishing hand” to it and had “resolved not to return to London till he has compleated it”—but no collation.<sup>70</sup> Instead of a textual apparatus Johnson provided a critical appendix, packed with observations by Warton, Percy, Farmer, Gray, and Heath. Though far from foolish, such an appendix was not the original plan; Strahan added the costs of printing the appendix to his account in superscript at a later date, alongside “Additions,” “Corrections,” and “Matter lost.” Johnson told Frances Reynolds on 27 October 1764, “I must finish my book.”<sup>71</sup> By the next spring, on 18 May 1765, he was sharing “such plays as

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick* (London, 1780), 216.

<sup>67</sup> *The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill*, ed. Douglas Grant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 126.

<sup>68</sup> Boswell, *Life*, 1:319.

<sup>69</sup> *Letters*, 1:232.

<sup>70</sup> *Percy Letters*, 2:59.

<sup>71</sup> *Letters*, 1:246.

you would see” with Garrick, suggesting that the actual text was finished with only the front and back matter outstanding.<sup>72</sup> On 13 August he told Mrs Thrale that his “present business” would be finished “the week after next” and, on 1 October to John Taylor, “My Shakespeare is now out of my hands, and I do not see what can hinder me any longer.”<sup>73</sup> The edition was published little over a week later, on 10 October.

#### IV. LATER PRINTING AND SUBSCRIPTION

Strahan finished printing volumes VII and VIII of the edition in September 1765. His account records printing 79½ sheets, whereas there are only 67¾ sheets in those two volumes; but the extra material was doubtless the preliminaries, including Johnson’s preface, which take up 11½ sheets at the beginning of volume I. It seems likely from the correspondence that Johnson did not finish the preface until near the end of September, when Thomas Birch wrote to Lord Hardwicke with news that “Johnson has at last finish’d his Preface to Shakespeare.”<sup>74</sup> Evidence of offset, first reported by Giles Dawson at the Modern Languages Association meeting of 1946, shows that the preface was printed alongside volume VIII.<sup>75</sup> One of the Bodleian’s copies preserves this offset from the preface especially well, across the last page of the appendix in volume VIII.<sup>76</sup> This confirms Birch’s dating of the preface. Closing half-sheets and quarter-sheets from volumes III (2K<sup>4</sup>), VI (2S<sup>2</sup>), and VII (2N<sup>2</sup>) were also printed during this last stage of the campaign. Gathering 2K in volume III of the Malone copy has

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<sup>72</sup> *Letters*, 1:247-8.

<sup>73</sup> *Letters*, 1:250 and 254.

<sup>74</sup> British Library, Add. MS 35400, fol. 309v.

<sup>75</sup> Dawson shared his findings with Arthur Sherbo during the preparation of his *Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare*, and Sherbo records disturbances in the ordering of the notes that accord with this pattern of printing, 12 and nn.

<sup>76</sup> Bodleian Library, Malone Adds. 50 e. 26, 2L8<sup>v</sup>. This set was added by the Bodleian to the Malone collection in 1925; it seems to have had no previous connection with Edmond Malone. Thomas Percy’s own heavily annotated set (Percy 7–14), which was presented to the Library in 1938, has no apparent offset.

offset from both *Coriolanus* (2S, volume VI) and *Troilus* (2N, volume VII), which confirms they were all printed on the same sheet.<sup>77</sup>

In his account Strahan charged £36 14s. total for “Corrections and Alterations” across all eight volumes.<sup>78</sup> The importance of the cancels was first noticed by A. T. Hazen, who announced his findings in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1938.<sup>79</sup> After the sheets had been printed—it is impossible to determine precisely when—Johnson regretted some of his sharper criticisms of Warburton and changed the text. New leaves were printed and the old ones cancelled. There are fifteen regular cancels and five occasional ones across all eight volumes. Luckily, Thomas Percy kept the cancelled leaves and pasted them into his own copy, now in the Bodleian.<sup>80</sup> In *Timon of Athens* we find that Johnson deleted an egregious note describing a passage on which Warburton had commented as “so clear, that it could not have neede[d] a note, had it not been obs[erve]d by commentators.”<sup>81</sup> Not all the cancels can be interpreted so easily. Some have been slashed and are thus not fully legible. For instance, Hazen tries to reconstruct the missing parts of a note to *Measure for Measure*: “[The] commentator has h[ere twisted] the meaning into h[is own sense to] make way for an [emendation].”<sup>82</sup> This is an admirable attempt at reconstruction and must capture the essence of Johnson’s critique. However, as the revision makes clear, Johnson’s point is not that Warburton misunderstands the immediate meaning, but that he mistakes its implications. The Duke’s arguments do not

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<sup>77</sup> Sherbo reports offset on the last page of the Preface from 2M of volume VII, and identifies breaks in the numbering of notes between these final gatherings and the rest of the text. The final sheets of volumes II, VI, and VII of the second edition, which we argue below were run off with those of the first, have conspicuous offset with one another in Bodleian Malone Add. 50 e.3, 6, 7: (III) 2K1<sup>v</sup> with (VI) 2S2<sup>r</sup> (reciprocal); (III) 2K3<sup>v</sup> with (VII) 2N1<sup>r</sup> (reciprocal); (III) 2K4<sup>r</sup> with (VI) 2S1<sup>v</sup> (reciprocal); (VII) 2N2<sup>v</sup> from (III) 2K2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> £17 19s. for the first six volumes and £19 5s. for the final two (British Library, Add MS 48803A, fol. 33<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>79</sup> A. T. Hazen, “Johnson’s Shakespeare: A Study in Cancellation,” *Times Literary Supplement* (24 December 1938), 820.

<sup>80</sup> The following cancellandum leaves or parts of leaves are pinned in by Percy: vol. I: X4, X6; vol. III: C5; vol. V: 2H8; vol. VI: R4, S1, S8, vol. VIII: K7, M1, N7, Q6, Y5, not all recorded by Fleeman. The cancels are not on identifiably different paper from the main text.

<sup>81</sup> Bodleian Library, Percy 12, 247.

<sup>82</sup> Bodleian Library, Percy 7, 312. Sherbo follows Hazen: *Yale Edition*, 7:192.

lead to suicide, in Johnson's view, because the almighty has fixed his canons against self-slaughter. We suggest as a more plausible reading something along the lines of: "[The] commentator has h[ere forced] the meaning into h[eresy in order to] make way for an [emendation]." Johnson would have had in mind the Albigensian heresy, which could be seen as colouring this part of the Duke's speech. Once again, Johnson cancelled the note in the final stages before publication because of its hostility to Warburton.

That Johnson involved himself in the final stages of printing is apparent not only from the cancels, but also from a letter to his friend Edward Lye, who was then preparing his *Dictionarium Saxonico et Gothico-Latinum* for Oxford University Press. On 26 September 1765—only a fortnight before the Shakespeare edition was finally published—Johnson gave Lye the following advice:

There ought always to be one sheet printing, another in your hands for correction, and a third composing. There ought to be more, but this is the least and if at Oxford they will not do this, you must not print at Oxford; for your Edition will be retarded beyond measure.<sup>83</sup>

Johnson wrote from personal experience. Certainly, we know that Johnson examined proof sheets for the edition because corrected sheets covering part of the preface survive at the John Rylands Library in Manchester.<sup>84</sup> Johnson consulted proof sheets in his digs off Inner Temple Lane and also at Percy's house, as Percy informed Farmer on 29 July 1764: "the proof-sheets of Othello have been regularly sent him to my house."<sup>85</sup> Thanks to the work of Arthur Sherbo, we also know that there was a second stage of corrections between the printing of the proofs surviving in the John Rylands and the final copy.<sup>86</sup> Johnson's thoroughness during the correction stage is manifest in his annotations. At the bottom of the first page he wrote "q. Signature"—the signature in question was an unbracketed A, whereas all the signatures in the final preface were bracketed. Elsewhere he modified numerous variant spellings, infelicities, and repetitions of phrasing, although more of the latter were evidently altered at a later stage.

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<sup>83</sup> *Letters*, 1:253.

<sup>84</sup> John Rylands Library, English MS 653.

<sup>85</sup> *Percy Letters*, 2:76-7.

<sup>86</sup> Arthur Sherbo, "The Proof-Sheets of Dr Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 35 (1952): 206-10.

The suggestion from his letter to Lye is that he corrected and returned proof sheets while printing was still in progress, in order to hasten the edition through the press.

Two letters to Tonson from the month the edition was published throw some more light on the later stages of the subscription. In the first, dated 9 October, the day before publication, Johnson writes:

Among those that will call for Shakespeare there are a few (perhaps twenty) that have receipts for two Guineas, and have therefore nothing to pay. The Guinea which You should receive must therefore be charged to my account. I hope to meet you to night at Mr. Steevens's, but we shall not perhaps talk there of business, I therefore write now to remove what might be otherwise a little difficulty, and to assure you that your civility during this transaction is very sincerely acknowledged.<sup>87</sup>

This suggests Johnson had more of a grip on the subscription than we otherwise have been led to believe. Nothing is said about the 250 sets where the second guinea should go to Johnson anyway, and where Tonson's role would have been simply to pass it on. We suspect that Tonson had already paid Johnson the 250 guineas, which would have simplified things in his shop, where all the guineas now became his. That would have been a friendly gesture to Johnson—who here acknowledges Tonson's "civility" in the transaction—and shows that Tonson was certain Johnson had the requisite number of subscribers. The second letter concerns the trade copies:

I have lately heard, and heard so often that I can hardly any longer refuse credit, that my Edition is sold stiched by the Booksellers (I am afraid at your own Shop) for forty shillings that is four [i.e. two] shillings under the Subscription. The Subscription was settled with your consent; and your consent alone implied a promise that you would not undersel me. This promise was likewise verbally made by you in my room in Gough Square, when we treated about the Edition. This is the worse, as the demand for the Book has been such, as left yet no temptation to lower the price.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Letters*, 1:254-5.

<sup>88</sup> *Letters*, 1:258.

Johnson's problem here is not simply that subsequent marketing is making his past subscription look expensive. He was still selling his subscriptions in rivalry with the booksellers—something that he would not have been able to do if he had printed the usual list of subscribers. Rather, sales were good and Johnson was still trying to pick up a final few subscribers before the first edition sold out.

How successful, then, was the subscription? Despite Johnson's initial disappointment, various reports confirm that he made a handsome profit. Thomas Birch is probably our best witness, having corresponded with Johnson about the edition and given Lord Hardwicke a running commentary on its progress. On 5 October 1765 he reported that "A thousand Copies only were printed; & I understand, that the Subscribers to Johnson are about seven hundred & fifty. Mr Tonson is said to have put another Edition of five hundred Copies to the Press; & unless he sells them, he will be no great gainer on the whole."<sup>89</sup> That tallies precisely with what we have already learnt from the contract, which allowed for the scenario where Johnson took all the proceeds from the subscription while Tonson and his partners only profited from later editions. The likelihood that Johnson knew precisely how many subscribers he had is slim. But he obviously told Tonson that subscribers numbered around 750 and Tonson ordered the new edition accordingly: in fact, 750 copies were to be printed, balancing those that went to Johnson's subscribers. That means Johnson earned approximately 1000 guineas or £1050 from the edition. Admittedly there is no sign of excitement at so large a sum in the correspondence—with the possible exception of very early in the process, when Johnson anticipated the edition would "be some addition to my fortune."<sup>90</sup> But the money from subscribers would have come in sporadically and that is doubtless how he spent it.

## V. SECOND EDITION

As Birch's letter makes clear, Tonson and his partners required a second edition in order to make a significant profit from Johnson's labours. Tonson ordered the second edition of 750 copies before the first edition had gone on sale—in fact before it had quite finished being printed. Donald D. Eddy's machine collation confirmed that for the sheet containing the final gatherings of volumes III, VI, and VII the same setting of type was used in the first and

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<sup>89</sup> British Library, Add. MS 35400, fol. 316<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>90</sup> *Letters*, 1:153.

second editions.<sup>91</sup> In a departure from the practice in the first edition, printing duties for the second were to be shared to expedite delivery. Strahan's accounts show that he was responsible for reprinting volumes VII and VIII (Tonson may have thought the type would not yet have been distributed) while William Bowyer printed volumes II, III, and IV. Bowyer's ledger also names "Mr Reeves" as the printer of four sheets in volume IV.<sup>92</sup> The first 68 reams of paper for this new edition were received by Bowyer on 19 September 1765, confirming once again that Tonson ordered the second edition before the first edition was through the press.<sup>93</sup> According to Fleeman, the first copies were delivered to Tonson on Monday 4 November.<sup>94</sup> Newspaper advertisements in the *London Chronicle* and elsewhere suggest the edition went on sale for the same price as the first edition just over a week after delivery, on 12 November.<sup>95</sup> The first edition had been published little more than month but had, presumably, sold out in that time.

Offprints of Johnson's preface from volume I were also issued separately for sale. It has sometimes been suggested that this was a small print run so as not to detract from the sales of the total edition. However, the forty-three extant copies catalogued by Fleeman would appear to contradict that assumption.<sup>96</sup> More likely the offprint would have the effect of an advertisement for the edition and not a replacement. Fleeman suggests that John Watts's successor as Tonson's regular printer, Richard Hett, seems to be "the likeliest candidate" to have produced these offprints.<sup>97</sup> Fleeman's guess is correct. Having taken over the Wild Court printing office from Watts in 1755, Hett—whom Bowyer described as "a man of mild and amiable manners"—inherited Watt's stock of ornaments along with the

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<sup>91</sup> Donald D. Eddy, "Samuel Johnson's Editions of Shakespeare (1765)," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 56 (1962): 428-44 at 434.

<sup>92</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Don. b. 4, fol. 191<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>93</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Don. b. 4, fol. 191<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> Fleeman, *Bibliography*, 2:1096.

<sup>95</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 9682 (12 November 1765); *London Chronicle*, 1390 (14 November 1765).

<sup>96</sup> Fleeman, *Bibliography*, 2:1097.

<sup>97</sup> Fleeman, *Bibliography*, 2:1097.



premises.<sup>98</sup> One of those ornaments was the same flower vase found on the title page of the offprint of Johnson's preface to Shakespeare.<sup>99</sup> This ornament had previously appeared in John Upton's 1758 edition of Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* and in the octavo reprint issued by the Tonsons. Other ornaments from those Spenser editions appeared in texts signed by Hett, such as William Stukeley's *An Account of Richard of Cirencester* (1757).<sup>100</sup> The ornament decorating the Shakespeare offprint was part of the same stock. Hett had previously printed for Tonson the 1757 edition of Theobald's Shakespeare which, as we have seen, Johnson used as copy. His established relationship with Tonson, experience printing literary editions, availability at the time, and the use of ornaments belonging to him all make him a very likely candidate.

Although there are numerous differences between the first two editions—documented most thoroughly by Donald Eddy—the most important from our perspective is the variant imprint.<sup>101</sup> Thomas Longman was among the booksellers listed in the *Proposals* who would take subscriptions for the edition. However, his name was not included on the imprint of the first edition, nor in the advertisements that preceded the publication of the first edition in October—including advertisements as late as 8 October. Perhaps, as Eddy speculates, he grew exasperated with Johnson's tardiness and dropped out of the project. However, Longman was then listed in all of the advertisements on 10 October and his name is included on the imprints of volumes I and II of the second edition. From this we may extrapolate

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<sup>98</sup> D. F. McKenzie, *Stationers' Company Apprentices, 1701-1800* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1978), 170; *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. John Nichols, 6 vols. (London, 1812), 3:607.

<sup>99</sup> On the use of ornaments to identify unknown printers, see Hazel Wilkinson, "Printers' Flowers as Evidence in the Identification of Unknown Printers: Two Examples from 1715," *The Library* 7th ser. 14 (2013): 70-79; Andrew Benjamin Bricker, "Who was 'A. Moore'? The Attribution of Eighteenth-Century Publications with False and Misleading Imprints," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 110 (2016): 181-214.

<sup>100</sup> We are grateful to Hazel Wilkinson for sharing her knowledge of Hett and his printing of Spenser and Shakespeare for Tonson.

<sup>101</sup> Eddy, "Johnson's Editions of Shakespeare"; Richard F. Kennedy, "Johnson's Shakespeare of 1765: A Comparison of Two Editions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," in *Reading Readings: Essays on Shakespeare Editing in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Joanna Gondris (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 323-29.

several nuggets of information. Evidently Longman had repurchased his share of the edition between 8 and 10 October. By this stage volume III through VIII of the second edition had presumably been completed, hence Longman's absence from those imprints. Only volumes I and II—or their title pages at least—were still unfinished. It is also worth observing that Henry Woodfall is listed as the second bookseller in the imprints of volumes I and II of the second edition, whereas “C. Corbet” takes that position in the first edition and all the other volumes of the second edition. Quite probably, then, Woodfall took a more central role at a later stage, and, like Longman, his involvement is acknowledged only on title pages that were yet to be printed.

Variant press figures reveal that some gatherings in volumes II, III, VII, and VIII of the second edition were reprinted from different settings of type: B-G in volume II, B-F in volume III, B-C in volume VII, and K and 2H in volume VIII. These gatherings vary in the press figures and setting of type only. Eddy names them part of “the third edition,” but that is to lend them excessive weight. In the final gatherings of volumes III (2K<sup>4</sup>) and VI (2S<sup>2</sup>), gatherings that, as we have seen, were printed late in the same sheet, Eddy finds some copies with press figures and some without, and suggests the press figures may have been related to a second impression. In volume III Eddy found press figures in the second edition only; and in volume VI in first edition copies only. But the sheets that were sent off immediately for the first edition cannot be systematically differentiated from those that were reserved for the second. Evidence for the overlapping of editions is very strong.

## CONCLUSION

Johnson's edition of Shakespeare has been almost universally criticized in modern scholarship: for its shifting copy-text, its dilatory appearance, and Johnson's erratic and inconsistent editorial policy. Those criticisms are based on an outmoded understanding of the eighteenth-century book trade. Previous commentators have routinely discussed *The Plays of William Shakespeare* as though it is a failed modern scholarly edition rather than a successful eighteenth-century commercial edition. Johnson did not deliver exactly what he promised. But judged against contemporary standards of editorial scholarship, his edition does fairly well. Insofar as Johnson's Shakespeare can be used as a case study, it must be to remind us that the book trade was a business first and foremost. Major literary editions required large investments of time and money by both the publisher and the editor. The edition would not see the light of day until profits could be guaranteed.

By reconstructing the conditions in which the edition was printed and published, we have suggested common sense explanations for many of the quirkiest features of the edition. Johnson believed that he could edit Shakespeare well and that he could finish the job quickly. Despite taking nearly nine years, he was almost right. He started work on *Macbeth* and Warburton's sixth volume, which he already owned, but then switched to Theobald's text probably to provide Strahan with better copy. He whipped through the early plays and had the first six volumes finished early in 1758. He launched what was really a very successful if untidy subscription, netting a substantial thousand guineas. Yet as he began work on the later tragedies—and accompanying textual apparatus—he got slowed down in the quagmire of Shakespeare's text.

#### APPENDIX: STRAHAN'S ACCOUNT FOR JOHNSON'S SHAKESPEARE

Strahan's account for the Shakespeare edition is transcribed from British Library, Add. MS 48803A, fol. 33v (originally 20v). The book covers Strahan's accounts from 1752 to 1772. Pages have a red vertical rule to the left (for dates) and three red rules to the right (for pounds, shillings, and pence). Two later additions inserted into the text in 1758 and 1761 are transcribed in bold type. The "Dec<sup>r</sup>." in lines six probably refers to 1758. Both accounts for the first and second editions have been crossed out with a large "x" to mark completion of the job and receipt of payment.

May 1756	Johnson's Proposals for Shakespear			
	No. 3,000 with Alterations	—	2	2
	Recdts for D <sup>o</sup> N <sup>o</sup> 1500, with Paper	—	1	1
<b>1758</b>	<b>500 more D<sup>o</sup>.</b>	—	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>April 1761.</b>	<b>250 more D<sup>o</sup>.</b>	—		<b>5</b>
Dec <sup>r</sup> .	Printing the first Six Volumes of D <sup>o</sup> .			
	207 Sheets N <sup>o</sup> . 1000 @ £1: 4: 0		248	8
	Extra Corrections and Alterations in these			
	Volumes	—	17	9

Received	June 26. 1759 £150: 0: 0	269	12	6
	Dec <sup>r</sup> . 18. 1761 119: 12: 6			
	Jan. 4. 1766 <u>114: 3: —</u>			
	384: 5: 6			
Sep <sup>r</sup> . 1765	Printing 7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> Vols of D <sup>o</sup> .			
	79½ Sheets @ £1: 4: 0	95	8	—
	Extra ^\for/ Corrections <del>and</del> Alterations ^\Matter			
	lost and Appendix/ in these two Vol <sup>s</sup> . —————	19	5	—
		384	5	6
Oct <sup>r</sup> . 1765	Reprinting the 7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> Volumes of			
	Shakespeare: N <sup>o</sup> . 750; @ £1: 2: 0	76	9	—
	69½ Sheets —————			
	Extra for 3½ Sheets Appendix to D <sup>o</sup> .	1	15	—
	Five ½ Sheets of D <sup>o</sup> . recomposed ———	4	2	6
		82	6	6